

**THE RESOURCE**

VOL. IV, ISSUE IV

Labor & Industrial **INSIGHTS**  
Magazine

Tackling the  
**MANUFACTURING  
INDUSTRY'S**  
Skills Dilemma

**INSIDE**

Why Are We Sending Our Kids to College?

Every Manager's Secret Superpower

Realistic Job Previews

# From The CEO

**At The Resource we are passionate about our story and the stories of evolution our clients have to tell.**



Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Hartung". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Kathy Hartung, CEO

# THE RESOURCE

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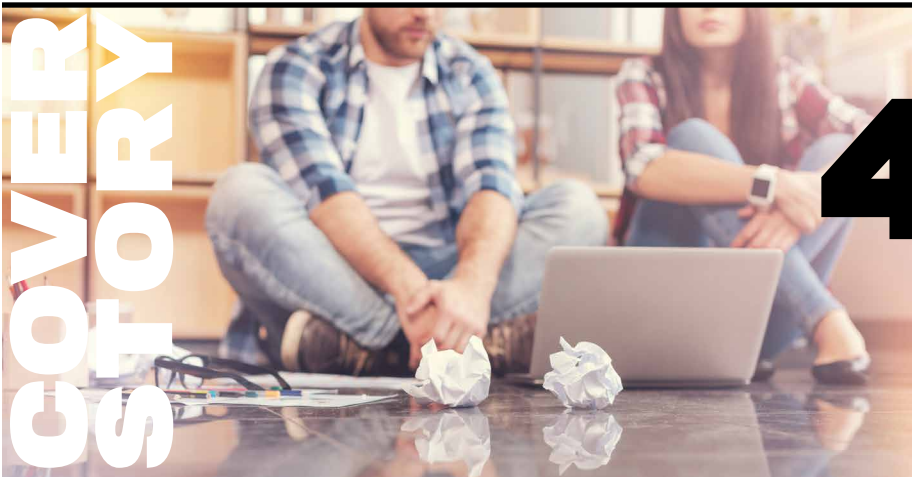
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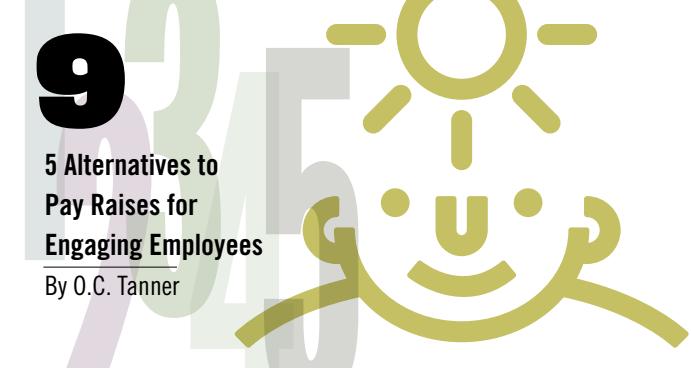


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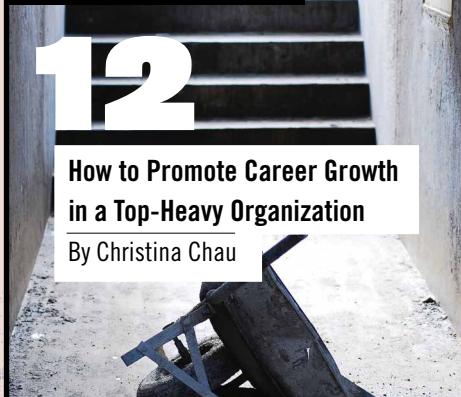


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BY CHARLES COY

In today's manufacturing industry there's an immediate need for highly skilled and highly educated workers who can develop creative ideas, solve complex problems, and deliver innovative products. But these workers are proving to be scarce. Left unresolved, this scarcity will have a huge negative impact on this sector: "over the next decade, nearly three and a half million manufacturing jobs likely need to be filled and the skills gap is expected to result in two million of those jobs going unfilled."<sup>1</sup>

To address this skills gap, companies need to implement better employee training and development, along with revised career progression models, new retention strategies, and programs to facilitate knowledge transfer from one generation to the next. Organizations must look outside of the traditional manufacturing skill set and adapt to evolving job requirements—or risk a decrease in productivity and an inability to meet customer demands.

I recently sat down for conversations with Robin Schwartz, managing partner at MFG Jobs (a company that connects employers and manufacturing job seekers), and with Daniel Levine, the founding director of the Avant-Guide Institute (a trends consultancy firm), to get their perspectives on the future of the manufacturing industry. In these conversations, we identified three challenges in particular that the industry will need to address.

**THE GROWING SKILLS GAP**

Currently, there are many available jobs in the manufacturing industry. But factors such as the decline in vocational training in schools and the disconnect between technology advancement and academia have led to a workforce that lacks the skills needed to fill these positions. Robin Schwartz sees in today's candidate pool not only a lack of basic employability skills (such as good



attendance, timeliness, and emotional intelligence) but also a lack of problem-solving skills and mathematical abilities.

Schools simply aren't teaching students the skills they need. "This gap is happening because technology is moving faster than training," adds Daniel Levine. "Manufacturing is quickly changing technologically, and the skills of workers haven't kept up." By rethinking their approach to training and providing workers with hands-on experience, exposure to current technology, and access to apprenticeship programs, HR leaders can begin to develop the talent they need.

### **KEEPING UP WITH AUTOMATION AND NEW TECHNOLOGY**

The rapid evolution of technology along with increasing automation have created an environment that requires today's workers to have an entirely different set of skills compared to workers from 10 years ago. "Automation is probably the biggest thing changing the workplace right now," Levine says. "There's a lot of talk about robots taking our jobs, but the truth is blurrier. What we're seeing, from a trends perspective, is that robots will take some jobs, but they will also create new ones—and these new jobs will require new skill sets." At the same time, Schwartz notes that the widespread assumption that most young workers are computer- and tech-savvy doesn't always hold true: "There's a surprising lack of technical and computer skills among the younger generation of workers."

To counter this lack of tech skills, many employers are creating their own on-the-job

training programs to build new skills. HR leaders may also need to shift their hiring strategies away from candidates with "traditional" manufacturing backgrounds and toward candidates who have the tech skills needed today (while treating more conventional skills as things that can just be learned on the job).

### **RETAINING AND TRAINING SKILLED WORKERS**

Nearly 73% of the respondents in the 2017 Fourth Quarter Manufacturers' Outlook Survey conducted by the National Association of Manufacturers pointed to "recruitment and retention of a workforce as their number one business challenge."<sup>2</sup> Schwartz points out that "the aging demographics of the manufacturing sector" increase the difficulty of maintaining a workforce with the skills and knowledge needed in this industry.

Having clear expectations, showing employees how they contribute directly to the organization's mission, and providing opportunities for skill development are a few steps that HR and managers can take to increase retention. But figuring out how to engage employees in those learning processes is another major challenge that organizations face. In addition to the old standbys of job shadowing and mentorship, companies could turn to technology for some promising solutions. "One of the most exciting things I've seen in this realm recently," says Levine, "is training happening with augmented reality and artificial intelligence" that can, for example, enable trainees to practice tasks in a virtual, personalized environment and learn at their own pace.

Technology and automation will continue to play growing roles in manufacturing. In order to develop a skilled, knowledgeable workforce that can handle these industry changes, organizations must adapt. By rethinking needed skill sets, providing better employee training, and using new technologies to their advantage, organizations can begin to close the skills gap. "The manufacturing industry is changing," Levine warns. "Those who don't recognize these trends are going to lose out."

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Charles Coy is the senior director of analyst and community relations at Cornerstone OnDemand (CSOD), a leader in cloud-based applications for talent management that helps organizations recruit, train, manage, and connect their employees. He thinks a lot about how technology can influence how businesses evaluate, motivate, and value their employees—especially in light of the rapid changes happening in today's workplace. Coy can be contacted at [ccooy@csod.com](mailto:ccooy@csod.com).

(This article reprinted courtesy of Cornerstone OnDemand.)

1. Craig Giffi et al. 2015. "The Skills Gap in U.S. Manufacturing: 2015 and Beyond." Deloitte website, [www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/manufacturing/articles/boiling-point-the-skills-gap-in-us-manufacturing.html](http://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/manufacturing/articles/boiling-point-the-skills-gap-in-us-manufacturing.html).
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# Use Onboarding to Gain a Competitive Advantage

BY VALERIE M. GRUBB

Onboarding is not a nice-to-have, but rather a need-to-have.

— KEVIN MARTIN  
research director at Human Capital Management



Few people would argue with Kevin Martin’s statement about the importance of onboarding. One possible exception might be someone whose sole experience with onboarding has been sitting through a long and incredibly boring program that focused only on some bureaucratic minutiae (such as the company’s dress code policy). In that case, though, it’s probably safe to say that such a program is something that no one wants to “have” at all!

Why care about onboarding? There’s a simple two-word answer to that question: *competitive advantage*.

A competitive advantage is what enables an organization to stay ahead of its competition. It’s based on many factors, but one of the most influential is employee innovation in new and better ways to deliver products and services. To achieve this innovation, a company not only needs to hire and retain the brightest and best employees, but it must also enable them to function at their peak capacity.

It can take a while for new hires (even people who bring years of relevant experience to their new jobs) to hit their stride at a new company because they first need to learn to navigate the organization’s cultural norms, corporate procedures, and internal approval processes. Therefore the sooner HR can teach them the ins and outs of getting business done in the organization, the sooner they can provide strategic innovation in their respective roles. And that’s where onboarding comes in: it’s the process by which new hires obtain the vital knowledge that makes it possible for them to be most effective—and innovative—at their jobs.

With all of that in mind, it’s clear that onboarding is no mere “nice-to-have” but rather a “need-to-have” that accomplishes three goals:



- Improve retention
- Decrease time to productivity
- Enable faster cultural indoctrination

Once a candidate accepts a job offer, the clock starts ticking on how quickly he or she can begin contributing to the company's bottom line—or how quickly “buyer's remorse” sets in. If an organization doesn't bring its A game to onboarding, new hires might become disengaged before they've even started working there!

In many companies, onboarding falls under the HR umbrella, but that doesn't mean management should ignore it. Because a manager's direct reports go through the onboarding process, he or she should have a strong interest in making sure that their introduction to the company sets them up for future success. Regardless of who's “officially” in charge of onboarding, it's critical that managers and HR alike stay informed about (and involved with) their companies' onboarding programs. To maximize their effectiveness, those programs should include the following strategies.

#### BE TIMELY.

Around 90% of employees decide whether or not to stay with a company within their first six months there.<sup>1</sup> The longer the time between the employee's first day and his or her participation in an onboarding program, the less time the organization has to influence the employee's “stay or go” decision. In addition, it typically takes new hires 3 to 12 months to become fully proficient in their positions, so starting the onboarding process as early as possible can help shorten this window so that the company can start to benefit sooner from the employee's expertise.

#### INCORPORATE THE VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER.

Who is the customer for the onboarding process: the new hire—or his or her manager? Although both parties have some overlap in their interests, the manager (and, by extension, the company) will certainly place the highest value on topics that help a new employee to be productive sooner. New hires do need to learn basic company information (such as benefits, policies, and procedures). But when organizations share that information with employees prior to the start of their onboarding process, they can instead use that time to shore up new hires' confidence and ability to tackle their new assignments.

#### INVOLVE SENIOR LEADERS.

Nothing says “You're valued!” quite like the CEO or other senior leaders showing up during orientation to welcome new recruits personally. In fact, a recent study by the Association for Talent Development suggests a correlation between low effectiveness of

onboarding programs and low direct participation rates of senior employees in those programs, with one survey respondent observing that “the key to effective onboarding is the level of leader engagement across the function and the entire organization.”<sup>2</sup> More involvement of senior leaders can increase positive perceptions of the onboarding process, which in turn can help new employees feel fired up and ready to contribute right from the start.

#### MAKE ONBOARDING INTERESTING AND WORTHWHILE.

Who hasn't sat through an incredibly boring onboarding program that lasted for hours and felt more like an endurance test than an introduction to the company? From their own personal experience, HR and managers already know that those kinds of programs can kill new employees' enthusiasm. If companies want employees to be engaged at their jobs, they need to foster that engagement right from the start. So don't use onboarding time to review important-but-dull company policies. Instead, ask new hires to read those documents ahead of time (remember, they are excited about joining the organization, so odds are good they will do their homework!) and spend just a brief segment of the meeting making sure they understand that information (perhaps with a short quiz, for example).

For the bulk of the onboarding time, focus on the information and goals that will set employees up for success in their new roles:

- Introductions to key executives
- The importance of the new hire's responsibilities
- Establishing mentoring relationships (both formal and informal)
- Product knowledge
- Company culture and norms
- Quality initiatives (or campaigns focused on other key areas)
- Networking and building relationships with other new hires
- Training opportunities to continue learning and growth
- Performance accountability and rewards system

#### TAILOR ONBOARDING TO THE AUDIENCE.

An employee's position on the company organizational chart should play a factor in determining what onboarding process he or she needs. In general, the more senior the employee, the more strategic the topics his or her onboarding should cover. For example, onboarding for new college graduates is likely to address the basics of everyday life in corporate America (such how to break the ice with older employees and how to manage up), whereas onboarding for a director or vice president might include topics such as mission, vision, and values

(and how they infuse his or her work) or future growth plans for the company.

#### EXTEND ONBOARDING BEYOND ONE DAY.

Onboarding should not be a “one and done” proposition. In fact, the best onboarding programs check in at 30, 60, and 90 days to ensure that new hires' expectations are being met. These check-ins also help managers and HR see if there's anything they can do to boost new employees' productivity. Additionally, they serve as opportunities to discuss training, mentoring, and other programs that can increase new hires' engagement at the organization.

#### SEEK FEEDBACK ON THE ONBOARDING PROCESS.

At the conclusion of the initial onboarding, ask new hires about what they thought were the most—and the least—valuable aspects of the program. Then ask them again for feedback at the 90-day check-in, which is enough time for them to have some perspective and perhaps suggestions for additional topics that they think should be covered in future onboarding programs.

When done well, onboarding can lead to great employee engagement, which in turn can decrease turnover, increase job satisfaction, and improve performance levels. Together, all of these factors have a strong impact on nearly every aspect of the organization, including productivity, quality, and reputation—and profit. By engaging employees from day 1 through an onboarding program that is interesting, relevant, and useful, a company can gain a competitive advantage that directly, rapidly, and positively affects its bottom-line results.

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# DEFINING AND ADDRESSING PERMISSIBLE EXPOSURE LEVELS

BY ALISON MONTGOMERY

Work site safety involves a great deal of terminology, most of which is pretty self-explanatory. (For example, “fall protection” refers to the steps taken to protect workers from falls.) But when organizations use terms whose meanings aren’t quite as obvious, confusion or misunderstandings can result.

“Permissible exposure levels” is one of those unclear terms. How is an exposure defined, for example, and what makes it permissible? And how can a worker or a safety professional determine levels?

The basic concepts behind permissible exposure levels (PELs) are actually very simple. “Exposure” is contact with a substance that is potentially harmful to humans. “Exposure levels” are measures of just how much of the substance a person is exposed to over a certain period of time. And “permissible” refers to the acceptable levels that have been determined by industrial hygienists, safety organizations, or, most commonly, regulators such as OSHA.

OSHA generally defines a PEL as how much exposure someone is allowed to have to a substance during an eight-hour period. Whether the harmful substance is something in the air or something a worker might touch, the PEL says that a human body can be in contact with only a certain amount of that substance over an eight-hour period before the company has to take measures to reduce workers’ exposure to it. (Note that OSHA’s PELs are based on an eight-hour period. At job sites with ten- or twelve-hour shifts, the PELs must be adjusted to reflect the parameters of the specific situation.)

To illustrate how PELs work, consider an example drawn from my own experience at an automotive parts manufacturing facility where workers soldered electronic parts to circuit boards that were then cut apart by a machine. The employees would come into contact with lead-containing dust when cleaning clogged hoses and when cleaning the machine. Although the use of an enclosed procedure and vacuums minimized the dust, there were times when work stations had to be cleaned and the vacuum equipment had to be disconnected.

Because workers were exposed to dust that contained a material that can be harmful when it accumulates in the body, we had to observe OSHA’s PEL for lead, which limited exposure to no more than 50 micrograms of lead over an eight-hour shift. Our workers normally worked shifts that were longer than eight hours, so we decided to be extra careful and set our own PEL at 30 micrograms over the entire shift.

To ensure that we did not exceed PELs, we measured lead exposure through blood tests performed during the annual fit test process. In addition, we mitigated the exposure to airborne lead by mandating respiratory protection for all the workers who performed soldering operations. We also used monitors to determine how far the lead dust could travel when the work stations were being serviced. And for respiratory protection and filters for the vacuums, we selected filtration material capable of capturing the lead particles.

Each situation is unique, of course. But this example highlights some of the issues a safety professional has to consider when working with substances that have PELs. The first step is to identify exactly what types of substances are involved and whether they are used or produced in an open or closed environment. If the hazard cannot be engineered out of the process, it’s up to the safety professional to determine how best to monitor and mitigate the hazard.

Conditions that may affect the substances also need to be considered. If the work is being handled outdoors, for example, the substances may behave differently in different temperatures and weather. Or if a substance interacts with other substances, their PELs may need to be adjusted. Additionally, safety professionals must determine the type of safety training needed and which workers will require that training. Protocols may even involve prohibiting employees from entering designated areas unless they’ve been trained in the specific hazard.

The key thing to remember is that the published PEL is just a starting point. Using the PEL as a foundation, the safety professional must then consider all aspects of the hazard and how it may affect workers. Once the conditions and risks are fully understood, then an appropriate safety plan can be created and implemented.

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# 5 Alternatives to Pay Raises for Engaging Employees

BY O.C. TANNER

Money is a good motivator, but employers should not rely on it as the primary tool for engaging employees. Companies need to reconsider their assumption that doling out bigger paychecks is the only way to achieve higher engagement levels. Instead, organizations that want to motivate employees should consider these five alternative strategies.

## 1 FOCUS ON OVERALL WELL-BEING

Given that few employees consider well-being a significant aspect of their organization's culture, there is definitely room for improvement in this area. In addition to offering "traditional" perks (such as paid time off), organizations need to adopt a more holistic approach to corporate well-being initiatives. Companies should put practices into place that both acknowledge and consider equally employees' physical, emotional, social, and financial needs.

## 2 ALLOW FOR COMPANY-WIDE SOCIAL GATHERINGS

Social gatherings (especially those with food!) can connect people and help them bond with each other. Holding monthly or even quarterly social events is a surefire way for an organization to boost morale and remind employees why it is an exciting place to work and a place where they want to put forth their best efforts.

## 3 CONSIDER THE SURROUNDINGS

Nothing makes people think "I'm not motivated to work" more than an uninspiring work space defined by a lack of windows, the absence of plants, or drab cubicles. Organizations should focus on creating spaces that foster connection, interaction, and collaboration. Such spaces can include open floor plans or common areas that encourage workers to do their jobs in the presence of their colleagues.

## 4 ENCOURAGE CONTINUING EDUCATION

Now more than ever, employees want to acquire advanced skills, be challenged, and gain new and valuable knowledge in their current roles. Having opportunities to pursue these goals will help employees be more engaged with their work—and keeps them up to date on the latest industry advancements (which enables their organizations to offer the best services).

## 5 RECOGNIZE A JOB WELL DONE

Recognition is critical for increasing engagement levels, because employees who feel appreciated and respected for their work are more motivated to work harder and better. Whether it's formal or informal, recognition can strengthen good team dynamics as peers and leaders celebrate great accomplishments.

Whether an organization is just now searching for ways to better engage its employees or has been looking for solutions for some time, the first step toward solving this problem is to realize that money doesn't fix everything. By implementing some of the strategies outlined here, companies can dramatically increase their employees' engagement and inspire them to achieve even greater things.

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This article was originally published on O.C. Tanner's blog, *'a' Magazine* ([www.amagazinedaily.com](http://www.amagazinedaily.com)).

# WHY ARE WE *Sending Our Kids to* **COLLEGE?**

BY MIKE MCKERNS

In March 2018, there were 6.6 million job openings and 6.6 million people looking for jobs.<sup>1</sup> In other words, at the same time companies were struggling to fill positions, there was a job available for each person who wanted one. Those open positions went unfilled for several reasons, but one in particular stands out: thanks in large part to educational trends and expectations, there is a major disconnect between the skills that employers need and the skills that job seekers have.

All parents want “something better” for their kids, and during the postwar years getting a college degree became a big part of that. For the past few generations, people have been pushing their kids to continue their educations after high school. Business, liberal arts, basket weaving—the field of study hasn’t really mattered as long as it leads to a degree.

That strategy worked for several decades: college became financially accessible to a significant part of the population, and a college degree (in pretty much any field) became an entry ticket to a good career. But over the past fifteen years, the job market has changed dramatically. At the same time, college costs have skyrocketed to the point that Americans now “struggle with a collective \$1.4 trillion in student loan debt.”<sup>2</sup>

If higher education isn’t adequately preparing our kids to join the workforce but is saddling them with tremendous debt that they can’t address (because they can’t get good jobs), then why are we still pushing our kids to go to college?

I think it’s because the rise in accessibility of a college education has led to increased stigmatization of manual and skilled labor. Jobs that require working with our hands are now seen as “dirty,” low-paying, and low-status. Our society treats trade school as the consolation prize for kids who aren’t “cut out for college.”

Today you’d be hard pressed to find an unemployed (or even *underemployed*) electrician, plumber, or HVAC technician. Clearly there’s a high demand for people with good manual skills! But the solution to the staffing problem involves much more than just encouraging more kids to focus on building the specific skills that employers are looking for.

We need to address the problem more broadly by working to change society’s perceptions of certain careers and industries. (For example, most people would agree that “network support specialist” doesn’t have a very “sexy” ring to it.) We also need to work on smashing stereotypes about which types of jobs are supposedly “more suitable” for women or for men. And we need to do this work not just in the skilled trades but in technology-related fields too, so we can avoid having the huge number of unfilled tech jobs that are predicted for the near future.

If, like previous generations, we want our kids to have “something better” than what we have, then perhaps it’s time to rethink how we help them achieve that. There’s no guarantee that the “traditional” route of



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going to college will lead to good careers (or the ability to pay off the massive debt getting that degree will likely entail). So maybe we should start by helping them understand other pathways to other options—such as vocational schools and tradeskill training—that will enable them to make positive contributions to society.

Mike McKerns is the editor in chief of *HR Insights* and cofounder of Mamu Media LLC. He can be reached at editor@mamumedia.com.

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# Every Manager's Secret Superpower

BY JESSICA MILLER-MERRELL

Conflict is an unavoidable aspect of the human condition. Since the dawn of humanity, people have had disagreements (and fights) over matters both big and small. Most of the time, though, they manage to work them out—thanks in large part to humans' ability to listen to each other.

Listening signals to the other party that his or her opinion and feelings matter. When people feel that no one is listening to them, they can feel disrespected and, as a common self-defense mechanism, go into "fight mode." Without effective listening, positive relationships can't exist—a fact that holds true not just in the personal sphere but in the professional world as well: the ability to build strong relationships is a key trait of a successful manager in any industry. Listening means getting under the hood, taking the time to really know another person, and helping others without necessarily expecting something in return. In short, this listening skill is the foundation of Employee Engagement 101.

The psychologist Carl Rogers and the social scientist Fritz Roethlisberger theorized that when speakers feel that listeners are being empathic, attentive, and nonjudgmental, those speakers relax and share their inner feelings and thoughts without worrying about what listeners will think of them.<sup>1</sup> This safe state enables speakers to delve deeper into their consciousness and discover new insights about themselves—including some that may challenge previously held beliefs and perceptions.

For example, consider an employee who believes that she always respects her colleagues' and customers' feelings. If someone tells her this isn't true, she will likely protect her view of herself by doubling down on her belief and discounting the



other person's judgment. In contrast, if someone asks her to describe her interactions with other people at work and listens attentively (while occasionally encouraging her to elaborate), she is likely to feel more secure with the listener and open up more. She might, for example, remember incidents in which she was disrespectful to customers or got angry at her colleagues, and also be more open to discussing how to change those behaviors.

More recent research indicates that when a manager listens actively to an employee, that employee is more relaxed, more self-aware of his or her strengths and weaknesses, and more willing to engage in nondefensive self-reflection.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, that employee may be more likely to cooperate (rather than compete) with other colleagues, because he or she becomes more interested in sharing others' attitudes (though not necessarily in trying to persuade others to adopt them) and more open to considering other points of view.

People, in general, want to be heard. A manager's team members and employees want to know that he or she is listening to their thoughts and ideas. Active listening is, in the simplest terms, a better way of paying attention. It's fully concentrating on, engaging in, and absorbing what someone else is saying. It involves obvious and genuine positive signals such as eye contact and reinforcing responses, such as nodding, agreeing with a "yes," and asking related questions for clarification.

People thrive when they are around others who reach out and show understanding. For example, when a manager acknowledges some of the work-related or personal issues that his or her team faces, they feel valued. This feeling can inspire confidence—and it's respected, self-assured teams who accomplish great things. Managers frequently have to deal with conflict in the workplace. When they do, even though they may not always agree with others' opinions, it's important for them to be open to the experiences and perspectives of their peers and employees—and the best way to demonstrate this is through active listening.

Conflict can make people uncomfortable, which in turn can make them defensive and unable to connect well with others. But when the other party feels that his or her concerns are being listened to and taken seriously, the chances of achieving a resolution increases. If both parties feel that their positions are clearly understood, any resolution they reach is likely to be longer lasting and perceived as fair. Such results may also encourage workers to speak regularly and openly about conflict, resulting in a more transparent workplace in general.

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## HOW TO PROMOTE CAREER GROWTH IN A

# TOP-HEAVY Organization

BY CHRISTINA CHAU

The names and details vary, but the same stories play out every day in companies throughout the country. Organizational structure, business performance, lack of turnover (because the company is so great that no one ever leaves)—any of these factors can prevent the best and brightest from moving up the career ladder. It just isn't possible to promote *everyone* who deserves to be promoted or to give raises to *everyone* who does outstanding work. When they don't get the promotions or raises they feel that they've earned, top talent starts looking elsewhere for better opportunities.

How can a company help its employees have careers that are healthy and growing when there's no room for promotion or raises? Fortunately, even when such rewards are outside the realm of possibility, there are other ways for an organization to help its people grow and develop.

“There was no room for her to grow here, so Sarah left the company.”

“After being passed over for a promotion for the second time, Joe is interviewing at other organizations.”

“Jen's been at the company for 10 years in the same role and needs something new.”

“Because his boss has another 15 years before retirement, Matt feels stuck and hopeless.”

### PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SKILL BUILDING

When leaders think of skill building, what they usually have in mind is a course on Excel (or some other software program or narrowly defined skill). Rather than try a “one size fits all” approach that puts employees in classes that don't necessarily align with their personal goals (and therefore don't facilitate useful growth), though, a company should instead find out where its employees really want to be in their careers and help them build the skills they need to get there. Possibilities include training on presentation and public speaking skills (and more opportunities to practice them), courses that help employees learn about the latest developments in their fields, and opportunities to work with teams in different areas of the organization.

### INCREASE ACCESS TO EXCITING OPPORTUNITIES

Every company has high-profile projects that attract the interest of lots of people but have room for only a few select team members. Examples include assignments that involve meeting with clients, business travel, or access to high-level leaders. Star employees who are excluded from these projects often feel that they are missing opportunities to shine, learn new things, and start building their social currency. Find other great opportunities for them (such as face time with the CEO or someone else from upper management, for example) so they don't feel overlooked at their current positions . . . and then start looking elsewhere.

### BUILD THEIR SOCIAL NETWORKS

Opportunities to change careers, make internal moves, or get promoted aren't always well publicized throughout an organization, and people often learn about them only through “word of mouth” channels. In an environment where “whom you know” can be just as valuable as “what you know,” star employees need to network within their own organizations and make connections that can boost their careers. Help top employees build their networks by pairing them with mentors, introducing them to other leaders and executives in the company, or organizing meetings in which they can meet people from all over the organization.

### MAKE THEM PART OF SOMETHING GREAT

Everyone wants to be part of something bigger than himself or herself. To help employees feel that they are making a difference, encourage them to align their work with meaningful purpose, empower them to suggest and make changes, give them ownership of their work, and show appreciation for their efforts and achievements. When given opportunities to be great, employees will find their own ways to thrive.

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Christina Chau, senior content manager at O.C. Tanner, has led focus groups and research projects across 20 countries, and uses these insights to create content that helps companies engage and inspire greatness in their people. She has been with O.C. Tanner for over 10 years and previously worked in market research and marketing for IRI, Memorial Herman Hospital System, and Anheuser-Busch. She has a bachelor's degree in sociology from the University of Michigan and a master's degree in marketing from Northwestern University. Chau can be reached at [Christina.Chau@octanner.com](mailto:Christina.Chau@octanner.com).



THE GOOD

## Realistic Job Previews

BY SHARLYN LAUBY

“Tell me one of your weaknesses.”

No candidates want to answer that classic interview question with an actual weakness, so they often come up with things that can also be considered strengths, such as “I work too much” or “I have perfectionist tendencies.” Companies, too, are reluctant to show off their weaknesses during the interview process. But today’s candidates want realistic previews of both the organizations and the jobs for which they’re applying. Just as companies want to learn the strengths and weaknesses of candidates, candidates want to know the good, the bad, and the ugly of companies and positions.

A realistic job preview is an opportunity in the recruiting process to give candidates a sense of what it’s like to work at the company. It is designed not only for the company to see how candidates handle certain situations but for candidates to understand what working conditions are like at the organization to which they’re applying. Because it’s so useful for all parties involved, the realistic job preview is rapidly becoming a standard part of the application process.

One long-used realistic job preview activity is the in-tray exercise, a paper-based assessment scenario in which a candidate has to deal with numerous tasks related to a typical business day. (A newer, computer-based version of the

activity is called the inbox exercise or sometimes the e-tray exercise.) Technological advancements are now enabling companies to innovate new ways to provide realistic job previews to candidates, such as virtual tours of the office and videos of internal meetings; testimonials from current employees are another option that’s growing in popularity. In addition to distribution via “old school” methods such as website postings and e-mail, this information can be pushed to candidates via newer social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

Accustomed to doing extensive research before making a purchase, today’s consumers are now increasing their research on job-related matters as well. (After all, someone who spends five hours comparing the features of two phone models will probably spend more than a few minutes checking out his or her possible future place of employment.) In response to this shift, smart companies are looking for new ways to give candidates an understanding of the employment experience—without sugarcoating any of the negatives—before they even decide to apply. Candidates who are fully informed about a company’s warts and still decide to embrace the organization are more likely to become engaged employees there.

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Sharlyn Lauby is the author of *HR Bartender* ([www.hrbartender.com](http://www.hrbartender.com)), a friendly place to discuss workplace issues. When not tending bar, she is president of ITM Group Inc., which specializes in training solutions to help clients retain and engage talent. She can be contacted on Twitter at @HRBartender.

THE UGLY



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